

**TEAM Westport**  
**2007-2008 Report**

**December, 2008**

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During 2007 and 2008, TEAM Westport continued to extend its efforts according to the mission, focus, approach and structure of its charter and progression to date. Those efforts consistently addressed the **Key Challenges** spelled out in our 2004 Report (see Appendix). Throughout this period, our evolution as an official Westport Town Committee continued as we expanded involvement, clarified roles and moved forward via continuous improvement in each of our initiative arenas.

Our mission has continued to be helping Westport/Weston achieve and celebrate a more welcoming, multicultural community with particular focus on race, religion/ethnicity and sexual orientation. In that regard, our process of promoting multiculturalism and diversity in ways that are engaging, compelling and fun remained paramount. While much of this took place via our ongoing committee structures, we instituted several TEAM-wide initiatives which highlighted the following approaches for initiative development and roll-out:

- Working through others
- Working with others
- Doing it ourselves
- Building Capacity

In addition, we continued our traditional approach of rolling out a comprehensive set of programs and initiatives through our organization's committee structure:

- **Outreach Committee:**
  - Work with Government organizations
  - Diversity-related cultural, social and faith-based programs
  - Regional partnerships including faith communities
- **Governance**
  - Legal issues and Internal Governance
  - Relationships with Government organizations
    - Town of Westport
    - Other
  - Planning and Implementation of "Friends of TEAM Westport"
- **Marketing Committee**
  - Developing and implementing an effective plan and infrastructure to
    - celebrate the diversity within the Westport/Weston community
    - promote a positive, welcoming image of Westport/Weston
    - increase awareness of events within the community which might bring people of diverse backgrounds together
- **Education Committee**
  - Youth, Schools programming
- **Program Committee**
  - Community-building events, programming and networks

The slate of TEAM Westport officers and other members currently include the following:

Gordon Joseloff-First Selectman, Shelley Kassen-Second Selectman, Harold Bailey-Chair, Glenn Lau-Kee - Treasurer, Bernicestine McLeod Bailey – Secretary, Nick Rudd-Marketing Committee Chair, Steve Daniels-Outreach Committee Chair, Judith Hamer/Margie Allen-Program Committee Co-Chairs, Barbara Butler-Education Committee Chair, Al Puchala-Governance Committee Chair, Stephane Kirven, Dolores Paoli, Amy Meyerson, Stuart Losen, and David Levinson.

Other members who were involved during this period but are currently no longer active include: Jose Estabil, Dan Woog, Lisa Friedland, and Cheryl Scott-Daniels.

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The following are key initiatives pursued via the TEAM-wide approach during the period of this report.

### **Working Through Others**

#### **Police Training/Alert Process**

TEAM Westport was invited by Chief Fiore to participate in the 3 year education cycle required of all police officers. We developed a module on cultural diversity in Westport (with perspective of what it's like to be minority in Westport) which was utilized in the training of all police officers (roughly 70) in 3 sessions held on Feb 15, 21 and 26 of 2007. The sessions were deemed a success by both the Department and TEAM Westport. In addition, it significantly broadened the relationship between TEAM Westport and the Department.

A fastpath Alert Process was initiated so that any acts of discrimination discovered by or reported to the Police Department would be communicated as soon as possible to the First Selectman's Office and TEAM Westport's leadership. The process has worked well since its inception. It was of particular value during a period of investigation of several incidents of racially and ethnically defamatory graffiti.

### **Working With Others**

#### **Staples Consortium**

In December of 2007, TEAM Westport's relationship with Staples moved to a new level as a result of a meeting with Principal John Dodig. At that time, he called for TEAM Westport to work with him to develop a community-wide set of initiatives from all quarters to address the broad issues of integrity and diversity. In early 2008, this led to the formation of the Staples Consortium comprised of a broad coalition of Westport public service organizations, town committees, Institutions and Clergy in concert with John Dodig and his team. The Coalition is coordinated by TEAM Westport and focused on jointly and individually addressing integrity and diversity issues community-wide through member participation, programming and operations. The Coalition met several times during 2008 and developed a set of internal recommendations for Staples programming and curriculum as its members developed specific initiatives of their own for impact outside the schools arena.

The following is an example of a cross-curricular suggestion recommended for consideration

- Three CT Family Environments
  - Inner City
  - Middle Class
  - Wealthy
- Impact of Job Loss, Serious Illness of parent or child
- Issues could span multiple subjects....for example
  - English  
Write about differences in lives or a given issue/aspect of life
  - Math  
Differences making household budgets work under various circumstances
  - Social Studies  
Social services available in difficult situations?  
Are they adequate? How would student improve them?
  - Health  
Differences in medical issues faced in the 3 communities? How are they likely to be handled now?  
What would student recommend to make things better?

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## **Doing It Ourselves**

### **“Conversation on Race” Series**

TEAM Westport’s programming efforts through mid-2008 were focused on co-sponsorships with institutions and other organizations in order to leverage our capabilities. However, with the advent of the official launch of Friends of TEAM Westport along with the 2008 Presidential campaign, we judged the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2008 to be the opportune time to launch the our first community-wide, ongoing series focused on direct engagement – “Conversation on Race”. The series was launched August 4, 2008 and has had 2 additional sessions to date. It utilized the backdrop of the Presidential Campaign and Election to provide broad umbrella topics for potential discussion as follows:

- **Are We Ready For An African-American President?** August 4, 2008
- **Has the Presidential Campaign in Westport Gone Beyond Race?** October 27, 2008
- **“How Will Obama’s Election Affect Race and Intolerance in Westport?”** December 9, 2008

For each session, however, we utilized the Open Space Technology process to ensure that the participants in the sessions dictate the specific aspects of and perspectives on those topics which are actually discussed. Based upon feedback from the first session, we added an 15 min. introductory portion to the October and December sessions which provided factual background information on the umbrella topic. We were fortunate in both sessions to have Westporter and Norwalk Community College President, Dr. David Levinson, provide that background. They were very well received. However, in the three sessions held to date, the discussions have been highly energized and effective. The outputs of all sessions have been logged and shared with participants. In the near future, we plan to utilize them as the foundation content for a forthcoming “Conversation on Race” blog on the TEAM Westport (or Friends of TEAM Westport) website.

Additional sessions are currently planned. Our intent is to work toward ‘continuous improvement’ of the sessions based upon feedback we receive from participants.

## **Building Capacity**

### **Friends of TEAM Westport**

TEAM Westport formally launched the community-based Friends of TEAM Westport organization after it received 501(C)3 status from the IRS in 2008. This is the primary vehicle by which we plan to expand community programming and involvement on a leveraged basis over the long term. It will also serve as a vehicle for regional and extra-community initiatives and involvement surrounding our targeted areas of multiculturalism.

The following are remaining key initiatives pursued by each of TEAM Westport’s committees during the period of this report.

## **Outreach Committee**

### **Young Voices**

TEAM Westport and Westport Rotary Co-sponsored the “Young Voices” media-focused initiative between students at Staples and Brian McMahon (Norwalk) High Schools.

### **NCC Panel**

Harold Bailey represented TEAM Westport as a participant in the April, 2008 panel at Norwalk Community College which reflected upon Dr. Martin L. King and the status of diversity 40 years after his assassination.

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## **Outreach Committee (cont'd)**

### **Leadership Meetings**

- **Police Chief Al Fiore**  
Invited TEAM Westport to develop a Diversity module for Required Police Training and updated TEAM Westport several times on various issues including recruiting
- **Andy Boas**  
Discussed the vision, achievement and plans of the Charter Oak Foundation and its impact on the education of Bridgeport youth
- **John Dodig**  
Discussed need for community call to action surrounding issues of integrity and diversity
- **Vicki Katz**  
Provided an update on the work of the Westport Youth Commission and an initiative developed to spur diversity at Staples
- **Rev. Frank Hall**  
Discussed TEAM Westport's plans and ways his church and the Westport/Weston clergy could help.
- **Westport/Weston Clergy Association**  
Discussed TEAM Westport progress and plans as of late 2008.

## **Governance Committee**

### **Legal Issues**

TEAM Westport worked with the Town Attorney's Office on selected Legal Issues in the Diversity Arena including those surrounding the potential TW role as 'first responder' to all discrimination complaints and Westport's process for handling formal discrimination or bias complaints

### **Friends of TEAM Westport**

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## **Marketing Committee**

### **Infrastructure**

The Marketing Committee continued to manage TEAM Westport's web presence. As of YE'2008, a major update/revision is underway at [www.teamwestport.org](http://www.teamwestport.org).

### **On-going Media Communications / Relationship**

Marketing continued to maintain and extend TEAM Westport's media relationships. It provided press releases and media coverage for most of the key initiatives contained in this report.

### **Brochure**

Marketing has worked extensively on developing a TEAM Westport Brochure for public distribution via the Westport Police Dept and other agencies. We are working with the Town's Attorney's office to get scope and legal issues surrounding content appropriately resolved.

### **Celebrate Westport**

The Marketing Committee served as liaison to the town's Celebrate Westport initiative.

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## **Education Committee**

### **Curricular Initiatives**

TEAM Westport continued its work with the Office of the Superintendent regarding Middle and High Schools curricular programming. "Prudence Crandall" was instituted as a biennial program for Middle Schools. In addition, support was voiced for continued curricular innovations such as the Civil Rights Initiative at Staples.

### **Open Choice**

TEAM Westport has continued to work with Staples and its Program Coordinator for Open Choice to address items of key concern for student participants including transportation, funding, computing and social issues.

### **Research**

Dr. Stuart Losen reported to TEAM Westport that in a national research study of students those from environments with low levels of racial diversity (such as Westport) tend to

- Harbor more discriminatory racial/ethnic attitudes than students in the country at large and their counterparts from diverse communities in particular
- Be significantly less prepared to work effectively in far more diverse real world environments

### **Staples Alumni Survey Feedback**

TEAM Westport was informed that the top write-in response on the 2007 Staples Alumni Survey as to what should be improved was more racially and ethnically diverse programming and perspectives.

## **Program Committee**

### **T.E.A.M. Westport Staples Scholarships**

The T.E.A.M. Westport Staples Scholarship is awarded to the Staples High School graduating senior whose leadership, personal involvement and high standards of service have most significantly advanced the engagement and understanding of the Staples Community with respect to diversity in the areas of race, ethnicity/religion and/or sexual orientation. In 2008, the awardee was **Madeleine Abrams**.

## **Looking Forward**

TEAM Westport will continue to extend itself as a Town committee in accord with our mission and approach. Of particular focus will be extending the launch of the "Friends of TEAM Westport" organization to spur community-wide involvement and engagement. Of course, we will continue to pursue the engagement of Westport/Weston citizens, organizations and institutions in our direct programs and initiatives. We very much thank the Town of Westport for the continued opportunity to serve in this very critical and exciting area. In addition, we pledge our ongoing commitment to helping the Town effectively meet its goals for diversity and multiculturalism.

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## **Appendix: Environment and Key Challenges**

### **Environment**

*The following are key elements of TEAM Westport's assessment of the historic and current environments for diversity and multiculturalism in Westport.*

- Westport would benefit from more residents with diverse backgrounds.
- Our comfortable way of life here masks uncomfortable issues such as prejudicial perceptions which might sometimes result in prejudicial attitudes and behaviors.
- Behavior based on stereotypes has been present in most institutions to some degree, at some times and has had a cumulative impact over time.
- Generally, existing channels, forums, organizations and mechanisms do not address multiculturalism and diversity centrally as an integral part of the core of their missions.
- By establishing and supporting TEAM Westport, the Town has taken a major step forward in proactively addressing the above conditions.
- In addition to TEAM Westport as a Town committee, a complementary, external grassroots organization leveraging existing assets in the community would be the likely vehicle for most effectively addressing all of the above conditions.

### **Key Challenges**

- a. Ensure that awareness, concern and conversation regarding diversity and multiculturalism are part of the fabric of the Westport community.
- b. Eliminate 'negative assumptions' that Westporters of diverse backgrounds don't live here and are not welcome here.
- c. Enable children in the Community to grow up with an expanded view of social reality - prepared to embrace the diverse world outside Westport.
- d. Enable the views, attitudes and concerns of children of diverse backgrounds to be nurtured, respected and encouraged to ensure their growth as healthy human beings.
- e. Ensure that Westporters of diverse backgrounds have facile access to the informal networks which allow them to leverage the key benefits of the community.
- f. Provide teachers and other employees from outside the community the clear understanding that Westport neither prefers nor expects a lack of diversity.
- g. Effectively address history and perception of profiling in Westport among people of diverse backgrounds.
- h. Expand perspectives and directions of community organizations and institutions to embrace the needs of non-majority populations, e.g., language, food, preferred activities , hair care, etc.
- i. Encourage organizations and institutions to include as part of their conversations and mindsets the establishment of explicit goals for diversity/multiculturalism and/or standards against which to measure change.
- j. Establish effective forum and mechanisms for addressing issues of diversity such that multiculturalism may be effectively achieved, celebrated and extended from individual through Town levels.